

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary Template

Title: Options to help people with “essential tremor”

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Plain Language Summary:

What is Essential Tremor?

Essential Tremor is a medical condition that some people have. It is a common condition of the nervous system that causes people to move or shake certain parts of their body without trying. Essential tremor can affect any part of your body, but usually only affects someone’s arms or hands. Often, the shaking gets worse when someone tries to use his or her hands. The shaking, or tremor, can make life more difficult for someone because it means that they cannot use their hands as much. Even a basic thing like drinking a glass of milk, or tying their shoes can become very difficult. Although this disease is not very dangerous, the tremor can get worse over time and will continue to make life more difficult for someone. Essential tremor is not caused by any other diseases and scientists do not know exactly why some people have it and some do not. There is no special test to tell if someone has a tremor or not, but people with involuntary shaking should consult with their doctor.

How can my doctor help?

Luckily, doctors have medicines that can help some people with essential tremor. One of these medications is called Propanolol. Propanolol is a great medicine and helps a lot of people with their tremors. In fact, the majority of people will have improvement with this drug! Unfortunately, this drug does not work for everyone with a tremor. Sometimes a person’s tremor simply will not go away, even with this medicine. Propanolol, like any drug, also has side effects. One of these side effects includes slowing your heart beat down. For this reason, Propanolol is not the best choice to help with tremors in people who already have heart problems, or for people whose bodies do not respond well to the drug.

What if Propanolol does not work for me?

So scientists and doctors have tried to use other drugs to help people with tremors. One of the other drug is a drug called Olanzapine. This drug has been around for a while, but is just now being looked at for use in people with tremors. Importantly, this drug does not affect the heart like the other drug does. So it can be used in people with heart problems! In one scientific study, scientists showed that people with tremors thought that Olanzapine (the new drug) worked just as well as Propanolol (the old drug) to control their symptoms. However, this scientific study also showed that Olanzapine had some side effects of its own, like making someone gain weight or be more tired. So Olanzapine is not perfect either. There are other options that also exist to help treat someone’s tremor, and your doctor can help you find the right option for you. Ask your doctor for more information.

What if I still have more questions about this?

Check out these recourses for more information about essential tremor and possible questions for your doctor!

The Mayo Clinic:

1. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/essential-tremor/DS00367>

Wikipedia:

2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_tremor

Handout for patients from the American Academy of Neurologists:

3. <http://www.aan.com/globals/axon/assets/2585.pdf>

Key Words:

Essential tremor

Involuntary

Shaking

Propanolol

Olanzapine

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Family Medicine Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up-to-date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.